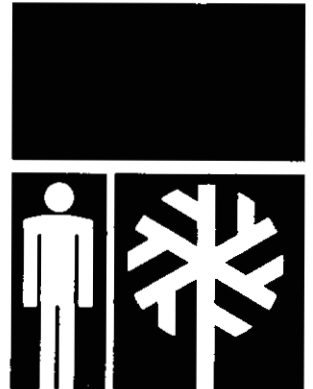


final environmental impact statement
wilderness recommendation

BERING LAND BRIDGE

NATIONAL PRESERVE/ALASKA



ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This section describes the proposed action and three alternatives for possible wilderness designation at Bering Land Bridge National Preserve. It also includes a map of lands considered for designation under each alternative, a scenario of possible developments and uses under each alternative, and a table summarizing those scenarios. The possible development and use scenarios are based on the wilderness areas being considered under the alternatives, proposals in the GMP, activities and developments identified by the public during the scoping process (see "Consultation and Coordination" section for scoping information), potential activities or developments identified in ANILCA, and projections by the Park Service based on current trends in visitor use. Except for the administrative/maintenance cabin at Serpentine Hot Springs, the scenarios are not National Park Service proposals; rather they are our best professional judgments of developments and uses that might occur in response to public interests and management needs in the next 30-40 years based on trends projected under each alternative to meet the objectives of that alternative. The scenarios have been developed for the purpose of analyzing possible environmental impacts in the EIS to meet the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Summary comparisons of the scenarios and the environmental impacts are presented at the end of the section.

WILDERNESS SUITABILITY

No lands were designated as wilderness in Bering Land Bridge National Preserve under the enabling legislation (ANILCA, sec. 701). The 1986 General Management Plan for the preserve included a wilderness suitability study, which determined that 96.6 percent (2,690,179 acres) of the preserve's lands (2,784,960 acres) are technically suitable for wilderness designation. These lands meet the criteria for designation as defined in the 1964 Wilderness Act and the NPS policies for wilderness areas.

There are 180,819 acres of the 2,690,179 acres that are subject to selection by native or regional corporations (including overlapping applications that are made by both) or for unresolved cemetery and historic site selections, and native small tract applications. However, these lands remain in federal ownership until they are conveyed and are technically suitable for wilderness designation because they are undeveloped and possess important wilderness values. Under alternatives 3 and 4, these lands have been included as potential wilderness lands in the wilderness areas being considered; however, if they are conveyed, they will no longer be eligible for wilderness designation and their management, use, and development will be determined by corporation members; corporation proposals for these lands are unknown at the present time. There are three groups of unpatented mining claims in the preserve in the Serpentine Hot Springs and Humboldt Creek areas; these

unpatented lands are technically suitable for wilderness designation, and these claims have been included in wilderness (in alternatives 3 and 4) pending completion of the validity determination.

In addition, there are 94,781 acres within the preserve boundary that are not in federal ownership, including state-owned tidelands and submerged lands (87,554 acres), conveyed corporation land (1,280 acres), and 41 approved native allotments (5,947 acres). These lands are not eligible for wilderness designation because they are not in federal ownership.

Most of the lands within Bering Land Bridge National Preserve are currently managed by the Park Service in ways that have not permanently impacted the wilderness character and values, according to NPS policy and guidelines. Any lands that are designated as wilderness under the proposed action or alternatives would be maintained in their current condition because no development proposals beyond those authorized in ANILCA and the Wilderness Act could be considered without congressional action to reverse wilderness designation.

The following map shows the area of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve that is suitable for wilderness designation--the area to be studied in this document. In Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, the study area is all of the federally owned lands within the preserve; there is no designated wilderness.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES IN THE WILDERNESS-SUITABLE LANDS/STUDY AREA

The wilderness-suitable lands in Bering Land Bridge National Preserve include the following: a portion of the land bridge, by which humans, plants, and animals migrated between Asia and North America; several areas with volcanic formations with pahoehoe flows, pressure ridges, collapse sinks, cinder cones, and the Twin Calderas near Imuruk and Kuzitrin lakes; the Devil Mountain volcanic field, cinder cone, and neighboring maar craters (of special geological significance because the eruptions occurred in an area underlain by permafrost); the Imuruk lava flow, which covers a vast geologic time span of eruptions, has volcanic cones, domes, vents, tubes, and collapse sinks, and is eligible to become a national natural landmark; Killeak Lakes, which are paired with Devil Mountain Lakes, Serpentine Hot Springs valley with its dramatic geologic landscape (granite spires), thermal springs, significant cultural values to Eskimos, and its important raptor habitat; extensive barrier beaches and lagoons along the Chukchi Sea coast, with their dynamic geologic processes and waterfowl habitat; Kuzitrin Flats, with its fossils providing data from Miocene through Pleistocene times; Imuruk Lake, with its 100,000-year fossil pollen record and clues to the climatic cycles of when the land bridge was open and closed; Cape Espenberg with its Pleistocene flora and fauna fossils; permafrost features, including thaw lakes, pingos, and ice wedge polygons; Trail Creek caves, with some of the earliest evidence of humans in Alaska; the Sullivan Bluff seabird colony; parts of four reindeer permit areas; and the Lava Lake area, which was

ARCTIC CIRCLE

BERING

LAND BRIDGE

NATIONAL PRESERVE

Very Suitable for Wilderness

Suitable for Wilderness

Preserve Boundary

Indian Selection, Native and State—includes subsurface and surface estates

Native- and State-Owned Lands—includes subsurface and surface estates

Designated Lands and Tidelands—state-owned

Small Tract Entries—includes native allotments, homesteads, T&Ms, etc.

Mining Claims

Note: Nonfederal lands within the study area would become eligible for wilderness designation only if acquired by the federal government.

0 5 10 15 MILES

NORTH

STUDY AREA

BERING LAND BRIDGE NATIONAL PRESERVE / ALASKA
U.S. Department of the Interior/National Park Service

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